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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2008

In Today's Papers

The U.S. and Iraq Reach an Agreement, But How Will This Affect Turkey? (NTV)

Media outlets note that the SOFA agreement between the U.S. and Iraq transfers control of Iraqi airspace from the U.S. to Iraq in January 2009, which media predicts will have a negative effect on Turkey's ability to conduct cross-border operations in pursuit of the PKK in northern Iraq. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports in "The Question Mark in SOFA," that "Ankara does not want a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq until the problem of armed militants is resolved."

Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports in "From Now On, Talabani Will Approve Cross-Border Operations," that Iraqi President Jalal Talabani is likely to chime in on future Turkish requests to utilize Iraqi airspace against PKK installations in northern Iraq.

Islamist-oriented Zaman reports, "Iraqi National Dialogue Minister Akrem al-Hakim will come to Ankara in order to explain what the SOFA will mean to relations between Baghdad and Ankara." NTV points out that a withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq will likely "require the use of Incirlik Air Force Base and the use of Turkish ports," while mainstream Hurriyet emphasizes that Ankara "may use Incirlik as a trump card in case the Obama administration supports the Armenian Genocide Resolution."

Editorial Commentary on SOFA

Oktay Eksi wrote in mainstream Hurriyet: "One of the direct impacts of the SOFA is that Turkey will have to seek Iraq's permission, i.e. Kurdish Regional Government President Massoud Barzani's permission, to conduct an air operation against the PKK. In reality, this means Turkey will not be able to counter security threats coming from its neighbor. Moreover, a complete withdrawal of American forces from Iraq by the end of 2011 does not necessarily mean that Turkey will have to deal only with Iraq and Barzani. There is also the possibility the U.S. will move its bases to northern Iraq and we will end up faced with a new reality."

Sami Kohen asks in mainstream Milliyet: "Will the Iraqi military be able to establish peace and security? Obviously, it will not be very easy to establish internal peace and security. There is also the

possibility that the withdrawal will be accelerated after Obama takes over presidency in January. During this new era Turkey can contribute to the re-construction of Iraq. Will the U.S. ask Turkey to use its territory for the troop transfer? There is no sign of such a request but even if there is, I am sure Turkey will not mind being open to such a request."

Mustafa Balbay in leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet notes: "If the Iraqi government is fully in control by 2011, the U.S. will set up military bases with significant numbers of troops in order to complete the withdrawal. In the withdrawal process, Barzani's strategy is clear: he thinks the U.S. cannot do anything without the Kurds, and a withdrawal will only magnify the Kurds' privileged position. It wouldn't be a surprise if the Iraqi government decides in 2011 that the U.S. should not leave Iraq."

Tehran Gives a Green Light to Erdogan's Offer to Mediate
Media outlets report positively on Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hasan Kaskavi's response to Prime Minister Erdogan's offer to mediate between the U.S. and Iran. In "A Green Light from Tehran," mainstream Milliyet reports Iran responded positively to suggestions of Turkish mediation between the U.S. and Iran, "During a press conference yesterday, Kaskavi welcomed Prime Minister Erdogan's offer - stated first to the New York Times last week - to mediate between the U.S. and Iran." In "We Are Open to Turkey's Mediation," liberal Radikal reports, "Tehran looks warmly at Erdogan's offer to mediate between the U.S. and Iran." Leftist Taraf carries the headline, "Tehran: We Won't Stop Erdogan," in his bid to mediate, but the article points out Kaskavi emphasized, "There are profound disagreements between the U.S. and Iran."

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Islamist-oriented Zaman reports in "A Green Light from Tehran to Erdogan Regarding Mediation with the U.S.," that Kaskavi told reporters, "For the past 30 years, the U.S. has spoken negatively about Iran. Now we will see if Obama's promises of change will ring true regarding U.S. policy toward Iran."

IMF-Turkey Close to Signing Agreement
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Radikal, Referans and others report the IMF and Turkey are likely to sign a 'precautionary' standby agreement. Mainstream Milliyet reports Turkey's Treasury Undersecretariat and the IMF have been in talks since August, and a deal could take effect in January. Turkey and the IMF are discussing a package of loans that total USD 10 billion. Milliyet notes there are reports the AKP government is delaying the talks with the IMF to avoid an IMF review inspection in March when Turkey will hold municipality elections. Milliyet says the disagreements between the IMF and Turkey revolved around public spending, municipality funds, primary surplus and projected income for 2009.

In a cartoon from today's mainstream Sabah, a fire fighting crew is headed out to fight fires and they come to a fork in the road with one road going to the fires in Los Angeles, and the other headed toward Wall Street. The driver asks "Which way should we go?" and his coworker says "It doesn't make a difference."

Unemployment Rate Grows in Turkey
Media outlets note that Turkey's unemployment rate for August 2008 increased by 9.8 percent in comparison to the same month in 2007. The number of unemployed workers increased 207,000 to a total of 2.4 million unemployed. Urban unemployment is estimated to be 12 percent, while rural unemployment is estimated at 6.3 percent.

Papers say these figures do not cover 797,000 temporary workers and another 1.7 million who have abandoned their hopes for finding work.

Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports that with these figures included, the number of unemployed in Turkey actually reaches 4.96 million, and the unemployment rate jumps to 18.6 percent. Business daily Referans reports additional job cuts ahead in retail, banking and automotive sectors in Turkey.

A cartoon from today's Cumhuriyet depicts a Municipality office distributing coal from its roof, but the people below are holding a

sign that says, "It's not coal that we want - we want jobs."

Turkey-Iran Sign Natural Gas Agreement

All papers: Yesterday, Turkey and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding to improve natural gas cooperation. Turkish Energy Minister Hilmi Guler and Iranian Oil Minister Gulam Hussein Nozari signed the agreement in Tehran yesterday. Mainstream Sabah reports that the MOU allows for Turkish investment in the development of three phases in Iran's South Pars offshore gas field. In addition Islamist-oriented Zaman reports the agreement envisages a gas transfer to Europe via Turkey at a rate of 35 billion cubic meters per year, including the joint construction of a 1,200-mile pipeline from the southern Iranian port of Assaluyeh to Bazargan in the northwest of Iran, which is on the border with Turkey. Meanwhile, all papers report the Iranian Minister Nozari said that technical preparations for the implementation of the project could take a year.

France Captures ETA Terrorist

Media outlets cover France's successful capture ETA leader Garkoitz Asiazu Rubina and French plans to extradite him to Spain. However, some note France is tough on ETA terrorists, but not on PKK terrorists. Mainstream Vatan carries the headline, "France Treats the ETA Differently than the PKK," pointing out, "France did not comply with Turkey's requests to extradite PKK terrorists, but France acts differently with Spain." Islamist-oriented Zaman

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reports, "France, Who Releases PKK Terrorists from Custody, Now Hands Over ETA Leader Rubina to Spain." Meanwhile, mainstream Sabah reports the story in a straightforward fashion in "A Huge Blow to the Military Wing of ETA."

Obama Will Not Forget His Promises (Taraf)

News outlets feature U.S. President-elect Barack Obama's interview on CBS' 60 Minutes in which he promises to close Guantanamo prison and end the use of torture during U.S. interrogations. Mainstream Milliyet carries the headline, "Obama: I Will Close Guantanamo." Liberal Radikal reports Obama vowed to "withdraw from Iraq, end Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, and close Guantanamo." Islamist-oriented Zaman reports "Obama Backs a Solution to Guantanamo." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet carries the headline, "Obama's First Declaration: The Torture Base Will Be Closed."

Editorial Commentary on Freedom of Speech/Domestic Political Debates

Ergun Babahan wrote in mainstream Sabah: "Justice Minister Sahin erred by permitting the pursuit of a 301 case against author Temel Demirer. The judiciary may think that Sahin's permission to proceed with the case indicates the case has a leg to stand on. However, the trial process will definitely be overshadowed by Sahin's prejudice, as was expressed in some of his unfortunate public comments regarding this case. Under these conditions, it is impossible to provide this author with an impartial trial."

Sahin Alpay in Islamist-oriented Zaman: "The AKP received half of the votes in the last general elections, but the ruling party is now besieged at home and abroad. Under these conditions, the AKP will either continue with EU reforms or surrender to the status quo in order to continue benefiting from the blessings of being the ruling party. The AKP is likely to choose the second option because the first one is too risky - it will cost the party support from certain circles. So far, everything is understandable. But how can you explain Erdogan and other AKP leaders' adoption of the MHP's political rhetoric (referring to his "Love it or leave it" comments during a recent visit to the southeast)? Nevertheless, if the AKP refrains from making further reforms, it will soon see the beginning of its end."

Editorial Commentary on U.S./Turkey

Cengiz Candar wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "A majority of the attendees during PM Erdogan's speech last Friday at the Brookings Institution think that Erdogan has become a bad political player since July 2007, particularly regarding the Kurdish issue.

Turkey's approach to the Kurdish problem will have a direct impact on Washington, but Erdogan's speech last Friday at Brookings was not convincingly influential on this regard. Thus, PM Erdogan's domestic democratic performance in the months ahead will be a key factor affecting the Obama administration's view of Turkey."

TV News:
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- A prosecutor in Istanbul has filed a lawsuit against 60 police, gendarme and prison officials linked to the death of activist Engin Ceber in prison. The prosecutor demands life in prison for six guards, and 12-year prison sentences for the other suspects.

- The owners of a hijacked Turkish ship said they'd begin on Tuesday 'ransom talks' with the Somali pirates. Somali pirates hijacked a Turkish flagged vessel, Karagol, off of Yemen last week.

- Parliament's human rights committee will conduct "surprise inspections" in orphanages.

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International News

- U.S. president-elect Barack Obama has promised to shut down the Guantanamo Bay detention camp.

- The Taliban threatens to launch attacks in Paris unless France withdraws from Afghanistan.

- The UN World Food Program (WFP) said around \$840,000 worth of food destined for needy Afghans has been lost so far this year in attacks.

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